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COP25 Madrid delays real climate action

by Peter Carter
Director, Climate Emergency Institute

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There is now, at long last, agreement that the world is in a planetary climate emergency. COP25, in moving from Santiago, Chile, to Madrid, Spain, was billed as The Action COP, but it has been lots of talk leading to no emergency action. In the enormous Madrid convention center, there has been no sense of the dire Earth emergency, except at the press conferences of the World Scientists' Warning to Humanity team (www.scientistswarning.org), with which I worked. Attendance at these was shockingly poor.

After a couple of days here in Madrid, Greta Thunberg put it together in one tweet: "There is hope. I have seen it. But it does not come from governments or corporations. It comes from the people." In her forthright way, she accused governments and businesses of misleading the public by fostering "clever accounting and creative PR," which is the simple truth. Hearing her close up during her appearances here, her sense of disappointment was palpable. Grenada's environment minister, Simon Steil, called out "those politically correct countries" who are saying the right thing but whose words are "disconnected" from their actions inside the negotiation rooms. "The spirit and the objectives of the Paris Agreement are being eroded clause by clause, discussion by discussion," he warned.

After 25 years of UN Conferences of the Parties, or COPs (165 signatory nations bound under the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, or UNFCCC), most people attending the Madrid COP are aware that nothing that will truly reduce global emissions next year can be expected. The actual negotiations are carried out behind closed doors. The only action from the process is more delays.

As ever, the European Union leads the pack in policy intentions, this time predictably called the EU Green Deal. The policy is for a "climate neutral" Europe. The EU will aim to reach "net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050," and that will be enshrined in a "climate law." That means updating the EU's climate ambition for 2030, with a 50-55 percent cut in greenhouse gas emissions to replace the current 40 percent objective. The 55 percent figure will be subject to a cost-benefit analysis and so may never happen, because the environmentally perverse economics of the world economy still puts corporate profits over the planet and its people.

The Indigenous people's panels that I attended quite rightly opposed the proposed increase in carbon credit mechanisms, which have not and will not reduce global emissions in the real world.

The COP-speak of "carbon neutral" and "net zero emissions" was exposed here by an emeritus professor and lead author of the World Scientists' Warning to Humanity's now famous peer-reviewed and published paper on the climate emergency (with over 11,000 scientists in support). These terms from the 2015 Paris Agreement are fatally deceptive, because they do not mean the end of the fossil fuel era, nor an end to deforestation (CO2 emissions), nor an end to livestock methane emissions, nor an end to nitrous-oxide-emitting chemical-intensive agriculture.

Grenada's environment minister called out "those politically correct countries" who are saying the right thing but whose words are "disconnected" from their actions inside the negotiation rooms.

We heard this when Greta Thunberg hosted a panel of scientists one morning. This most important event was poorly attended, even though Greta has been consistently urging people and policy makers to learn and act on the science.

I also attended the presentation by Al Gore. He packed the large plenary auditorium. An English voice behind me, waiting with the large milling crowd, said "My, I didn't know he was still that popular." It did not take long to understand why, as he launched into his latest slide show. Still the accomplished flawless presenter, his explanations were injected with real passion. His narration regarding the well-known thin film of the atmosphere this time said the young people of the world are trapped – *trapped* beneath this global-heating, climate-changing, greenhouse gas envelope. His images from the resulting record climate disasters of 2019 were, as he warned, quite terrifying.

The actual negotiations are carried out behind closed doors. The only action from the process is more delays.

On a slightly positive note for scientific truth, truly Earth-shattering science reports were released at COP25. They have got much worse with each passing COP. We heard the 2018 IPCC 1.5ºC Report, referred to by the December 2019 UNEP Gap Report released here, as requiring a 7.6 percent cut in emissions per year from 2020 to 2030. But checking the COP25 formal documents, this science is absent. The IPCC posted two excellent update presentations on the UN Climate Secretariat site, but these are not formally included in the COP25 negotiations, and I did not find anyone who was aware of them.

The first few COPs were constructive and hopeful, but it was not long until the sabotaging of the process by the governments of high fossil-fuel-producing and carbon-emitting countries captured the UN COP process. They now have a stranglehold on it and our future. This is not to criticize the good intentions of the UN, but it is amazing how policymakers here can spin out two weeks of meetings to arrive back where they were before the COP. No one new to the convoluted process and COP-speak terms could possibly understand what is going on at the end of the two weeks, though they would assume that something must have been achieved. Alas, they would be wrong. The terms of the 1992 convention have been lost sight of, with circular discussions regarding the 2015 Paris Agreement. A whole day can be spent arguing about language to finally arrive at an incoherent word mash like "Nationally Determined Contributions" (NDCs, or COP-speak for national emissions targets). Year after year, apparently hopeful statements reveal loopholes that lead nowhere to nothing – and global emissions keep rising.

The harsh truth on emissions is that planned extraction of coal, oil and gas is already enough to blow past the 1.5ºC target and even 2ºC. We know from the past two COPs that it is the big fossil fuel producers – the US, Australia, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Brazil, Russia – who consistently work to undermine a *continued p.5…*

common ground

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photo credit: Ale_Mi

Climate change has happened because of human behaviour, therefore it's only natural it should be us, human beings, to address this issue. It may not be too late if we take decisive actions today.

It's not only government. Government cannot do it alone. The UN cannot do it alone. There should be full partnership… then we should have civil society coming together. Even one normal citizen – they have a role to play.

– Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General, United Nations 2007-2016

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...*COP25 from pg. 3*

rapid reduction in global emissions. Breaking with COP tradition of blaming no one for the destruction of our planet from greenhouse gas emissions, one EU lawmaker charged such nations of holding up progress at COP25.

How close are countries to meeting their (paltry) emissions targets and to limiting global warming to 1.5ºC or 2ºC? A so-called "stocktake" session was organized by Chile's Minister of Environment, Carolina Schmidt, COP25 president, to discuss mitigation efforts of Parties up to 2020. Several key developing countries called for measures to address the pre-2020 "gaps in ambition" and climate finance caused by the developed countries' failure to abide by their agreements reached under the UN climate convention. "Ambition" is COP-speak in place of "commitment" and for delaying actual rapid reductions in emissions.

Apparently no one knew that a fully calculated stocktake had been carried out earlier this year by the UN Secretariat, which showed a substantial *increase* in global emissions by 2030, while also showing that for the 1.5ºC limit and even a planetarily catastrophic 2ºC limit, global emissions had to go into rapid decline by the end of 2020. Two UNEP reports released here in Madrid showed exactly the same thing. The experts on Greta's science panel warned that CO2 emissions are still increasing and, as described in a World Meteorological Organization (WMO) State of the Climate report released for COP25, atmospheric greenhouse gases are increasing faster than ever. 2019 will be a record year for costly and damaging extreme weather events and for the climate-change-driven displacement of the world's most vulnerable – and most innocent – people, amounting to 22 million climate refugees.

The Indigenous people's panels that I attended quite rightly opposed the proposed increase in carbon credit mechanisms, which have not and will not reduce global emissions in the real world.

The COP25 delaying actions are actions of economic genocide by the high emitters, as well as actions for the end of civilization, of the human race, and of most life. That is because the WMO has said that atmospheric CO2 is rising faster than at least the past 40 million years. To top off the terrifying news that policy-makers and the governments of world powers take in their stride, the NOAA annual Arctic Report Card was just released, and it confirmed their 2016 Report that the Arctic has switched from a carbon sink to a carbon source, with the ominous but understated conclusion that "new regional accelerating feedback from changing Arctic ecosystems may already be underway."

Another just-published paper on the effect of global warming on the jet stream made headlines. The researchers have identified alteration of the northern hemisphere jet stream, which can cause massive heat waves across several major agricultural regions in the northern hemisphere at once. The heat waves will certainly become worse in coming years and decades, as the world continues to be heated up by continued greenhouse gas emissions. Crops cannot withstand extreme heat waves, as such events in the US and Europe and Russia have already proved.

Fossil-fuel-money-corrupted governments and power mad corporations are driving us all to the cliff of climate oblivion. But in the past two years a great global pushback has started, which will grow in numbers and determination. And so we prepare for Glasgow's COP26 next year with grim determination that the truth of science must win out. Good must prevail over the ultimate evil of deliberate global climate catastrophe. Through this COP25, people have come together who will not abandon Greta and her young generation.

Dr. Peter Carter, a retired family physician, founded the Climate Emergency Institute in 2009. He is an expert reviewer for the IPCC, and with Elizabeth Woodworth co-authored **Unprecedented Crime: Climate Science Denial** and **Game Changers for Survival** in 2018. He lives on Pender Island.

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Is the most widely prescribed heartburn pill on the planet killing people?

The more you know, the more you're uncertain.

by Alan Cassels

In the 2008 book "Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance", historians Robert Procter and Londa Schiebinger describe the concept of Agnotology which means the "study of intentionally induced ignorance or doubt, particularly the publication of intentionally inaccurate or misleading scientific data."

My world is riven with doubt because so much of the published pharmaceutical research has enormous potential for bias. Questions regarding which drug should be prescribed, for whom, and for how long are never easily answered. It is fair to say our collective ignorance around the harms related to drugs has become a monumental stain on the credibility of modern medicine. When I hear a researcher say he "knows" something for sure about drug safety, the only thing I "know" for sure is he's misleading all of us.

Over the last decade or so I have followed intense debates over the harm associated with a widely-used heartburn drug, where two lines of debate follow competing visions of what truth is. The reason this debate is so important is that there are lives at stake. A lot of them. Proton Pump Inhibitors (PPIs) are primarily prescribed to treat symptoms of heartburn or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), reflux esophagitis and peptic ulcer disease (PUD). These drugs include the following (brand names in brackets):

- omeprazole (Losec®)
- esomeprazole (Nexium®)
- lansoprazole (Prevacid®)
- pantoprazole (Pantoloc®, Tecta™)
- rabeprazole (Pariet®) and
- dexlansoprazole (Dexilant®).

While these drugs can be very effective at treating short term bouts of heartburn, for the tens of millions around the world who take them for years on end, we can't say for sure if they are shortening their lives. While some researchers (including myself) might view these drugs as poster children for the rampant use of potentially dangerous drugs, others don't have such worries.

About a third of Canadians over 65 use PPIs, and nearly a quarter of them use them chronically (consuming a minimum of 180 days worth in a year). Many of those taking PPIs, are taking them beyond the 90 days that are recommended as a maximum. In BC, almost 50,000 seniors have been taking the drugs for five years or more, and extrapolated across the country that would mean, at a minimum, half a million seniors across Canada are long-term users. This could be a disaster right in front of our eyes. Or not.

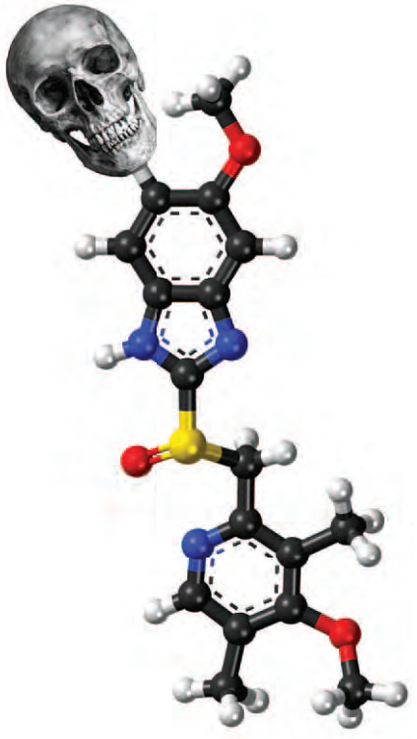

photo montage shows esomeprazole

A two sided debate

Some researchers maintain that long-term use of PPIs could be contributing to the early death of many, many people. Others say that there is little to worry about and that most of the research showing PPI-related deaths is unreliable. Who is right?

There is *one* fact upon which people on both sides agree: if you need to take a PPI, you should take it for the shortest period of time at the lowest possible dose. Go low and go slow, is a principle that applies to most every pill you swallow. However, despite this agreement, collectively we have to recognize that there is a lot of ignorance and doubt surrounding the long-term use of PPIs. Which brings me to Agnotology and the kind of "culturally induced ignorance or doubt" which is likely leading to misleading science, biased conclusions and ignorant, potentially fatal use of these drugs.

Many readers of *Common Ground* are well-versed in the various controversies where powerful interests (think oil companies and climate change or tobacco companies and the safety of tobacco) mount terribly effective campaigns based on ignorance. After all, if you don't know for sure that cigarettes kill people or whether C02 emissions are warming the planet, then how can you act properly? The PR companies defending the tobacco industry famously described their activities as "doubt is our product." You could say the same about climate change deniers. By planting seeds of doubt about the dangers of cigarettes, they effectively forced decades of delay before governments began to regulate and restrict what was clearly a murderous product.

I see the same thing all the time in the drug world. Those companies who stand to win or lose billions are heavily invested in the production of doubt. If you can skillfully build a case for doubt around long-term drug safety, you can keep markets buoyant and lucrative. Whether or not physicians believe PPIs can kill comes down to what they consider as "true".

Randomized Controlled Trials vs. Observational studies: which ones are closer to the truth?

The list of alleged adverse effects of PPIs has continued to grow over the last 20 years, including *C-difficile* (a sometimes deadly infection), pneumonia, fractures, as well as chronic kidney disease, cancer of the stomach and cardiovascular disease. These adverse effects have only really been found in longer-term observational studies which follow groups of patients over many years, and monitor PPI patients against similar groups of patients who don't take PPIs, or who take other heartburn drugs. Observational studies have used large groups of PPI users from health insurance databases, where statistical methods can tease out whether PPI users are at greater harm than non-users.

Many people discount observational studies, saying they are full of confounding factors and hence can't be trusted. Maybe there are more smokers, more overweight people, more people with genuine stomach diseases among the PPI users, and that's why they have higher rates of illness. If the PPI patients were sicker to start with, then a higher death rate might be due to underlying disease, and not the PPI.

PPIs are approved for sale around the world based on results from short-term randomized controlled trials (RCTs). RCTs are considered the most reliable proof of effectiveness and safety of drugs. During such trials, some patients are randomly assigned the drug and others get a placebo or a control treatment. Then the patients are followed for a period of time, and any effects – both beneficial and harmful – are measured. However, trials used to approve PPIs may be less than 12 weeks long and are basically too short to uncover potential serious harms related to long term use. RCTs of PPIs don't show the same rate of adverse effects compared to observational studies, because those harms, if real, are related to long term use.

So here's the conundrum: If you rely only on RCTs as being "the truth" you'd say PPIs are mostly perfectly safe. But if you only believed the long-term observational studies, you'd say the PPIs are probably deadly. *continued p.15...*

Compassionate holiday meals

About ten percent of Canadians are choosing plant-based meals and the trend is accelerating, especially among young people. So you are likely to have at least one vegetarian or vegan at your holiday dinner table. They may be making this choice because they have learned from the World Health Organization that cured meats such as ham are Group 1 carcinogens, meaning they are in the same category as benzene and cigarette smoking. They may be making this choice because they are aware of the high environmental costs of using water, fuel, pesticides, and herbicides in order to feed plant foods to animals, which we then eat. Or they may have seen footage or read reports about the lives and deaths of farm animals such as turkeys – even those that are free range.

So what can you put on your holiday table?

Many traditional menu items are plant-based: brussels sprouts, baked sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, and a big, colorful salad. Gravy can easily be made with vegetarian soup stock and any oil. Mashed potatoes taste great when made with non-dairy milk, and a spread such as Earth Balance. If you'd like to add a ready-made holiday roast or holiday goodies, you can find a selection at Vegan Supply through these links: vegansupply.ca/collections/all/roast, and vegansupply.ca/collections/all/holiday. They have locations on East Pender near Main Street and can deliver to your home, or to several pickup locations. Other supermarkets and natural foods stores carry some of these items. Another good choice is a stuffed squash; for recipes do a search at my nutrispeak website https://nutrispeak.com/posts/.

If you are going out for a holiday meal, or for snacks after a winter outing, you can find a variety of restaurants (worldwide) that offer tasty food through the website happycow.net.

Kale and Red Pepper Holly Ring Makes about 5 1/2 cups
From *Cooking Vegetarian* by V. Melina and J. Forest

The deep green kale tossed with bright red bell peppers, resembles a small holly wreath when presented on a plate. This simple yet elegant dish is perfect for the holiday season and adds color and a festive touch at any time of the year. For larger gatherings, double the recipe. It is a rich source of calcium, iron, potassium, the antioxidant vitamins A, C, and E.

- 12 C thinly sliced kale leaves, stem removed, packed
- 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 4 tsp balsamic vinegar
- 4 tsp tamari or soy sauce
- 1/2 C diced sweet red pepper or small cranberry tomatoes

Place kale in a steamer. Cover and briefly steam over medium-high heat until the kale is soft to the bite. Drain in a colander and press out any excess water. Combine the oil, vinegar, and tamari in a large bowl. Add the kale, toss to coat the leaves with dressing, and arrange on a platter. Create a round wreath shape by pushing the kale toward edges of platter, leaving a clean, open space in the center. Sprinkle with the red pepper and serve.

Vesanto Melina is a Vancouver Registered Dietitian and award winning author. Websites: nutrispeak.com, becomingvegan.ca , and kickdiabetescookbook.com.

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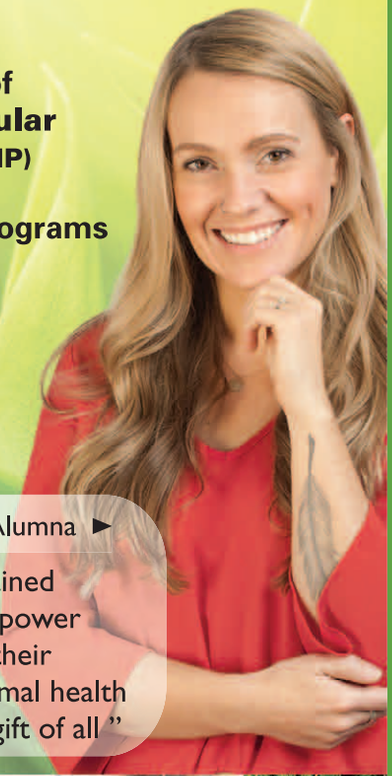

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Leela Gilday's timely *North Star Calling*

The northern sky wheels around Polaris, the star humans have relied on to sail seas, cross deserts, escape slavery. And Leela Gilday's remarkable fifth album, *North Star Calling,* also provides light for a journey. Very accessible and highly visible, it's a cultural touchstone for our country's overdue reconciliation and hoped-for transformation.

"Raising awareness is my life's work," the acclaimed singer-songwriter said shortly after returning home to Yellowknife from an international tour. "To open hearts and minds – which can be difficult and uncomfortable – is essential to creating and building new relationships.

"In places I've never been to before, such as Greenland or Australia, even Finland, Germany, or Quebec where English is scarce (never mind the language of my Dené people), what resonates down to our DNA is primal, a universal connection to land and water. Those messages from the album ring true with people the world over."

On an increasingly divided and endangered planet, other global commonalities include escalating suicide, racism, and the stigma of mental illness. Along with this goes the need for spiritual awakening, a longing for lost vision, and a search for new values.

"It's complicated. I'm able to share and celebrate, after moving through what's kept me from living my life. It's not Dené, or an indigenous people's thing. It's human, our birthright. Everything is better when you're connected to the land. It's absolutely true and has always been my compass," she explains.

North Star Calling is a sonic journey to the Northwest Territories, with ravens overhead, drumming and dancing, a singing elder. But the album is no soundtrack for some flyover travelogue. There are "hard truths". And songs like "Hard Ground". On the title track, she sings:

We were born broken, though borne of love,
Bearing the scars of a war we don't speak of,
Fighting our way from cradle to grave
Searching for light through darkest days.

"It's five years between records, a transformation in beautiful, difficult musical and personal experiences. We must stand in the pain, live with courage, boldness and joy. I examined my fears and faced them in the writing and in the studio," she reports. "It is also, for the first time and in an honest way, about healing, true healing, not just the absence of pain, or addictions. This record is me letting go."

photo courtesy Leela Gilday

North Star Calling is bookended by a wing and a prayer. "Rolling Thunder" imagines the sound of the global gathering of Earth and Water Protectors. The final song *Yake Gotin,* meaning "Star People" or holy people, is a hymn for wholeness to a Creator, a recognition of ourselves as a continuum and of ancestors who help us daily.

Full credit to producer/engineer/mixer Hill Kourkoutis, who subtly weaves together the drumming heartbeat of First Nations music, acclaimed throat-singing of Tanya Tagaq, eclectic guitars and other assorted strings, and a compelling duet with Logan Staats and a "Friends Choir".

Gilday says: "She pushed me to be vulnerable, urging me to step up, without bells, whistles, vocal gymnastics, past my comfort zone, a super scary and amazing experience. Hill is lightning fast and extremely musical, also intuitive, seeking the heart and soul, and shaping the production to serve the artist and song. The sky is the limit for Kourkoutis."

Also standing out in the star power are Gilday's passionate and versatile vocals. Schooled in opera and with a master's degree in voice, she is steeped in pre-teen performances and the soulful recordings of Aretha Franklin. The palate: her tradition and environment; the challenge: finding her authentic voice.

"Be the kindest, most gentle person you can be to yourself and to those around you. Remove yourself from situations you can't handle (for whatever reason) – no need to make excuses. Reach out to your support networks if you need it! And just remember you are definitely not alone in this struggle. We are all out here trying," she advises.

"We find ourselves at a critical time with climate change. Traditional values, stories, the world view of Indigenous peoples – and specifically Indigenous women – I think, are key to the future," says Gilday.

Everyone from Sir Richard Attenborough to David Suzuki have identified Indigenous people as humanity's last, best hope. Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission outlines the shameful legacy and 94 recommendations to redress it. We are being urged to listen and to act. Leela Gilday's *North Star Calling* is for those who want to do both. Her home page www.leelagilday.com.

Bruce Mason is a Vancouver and Gabriola-Island based five-string banjo player, gardener, freelance writer and author of **Our Clinic**.

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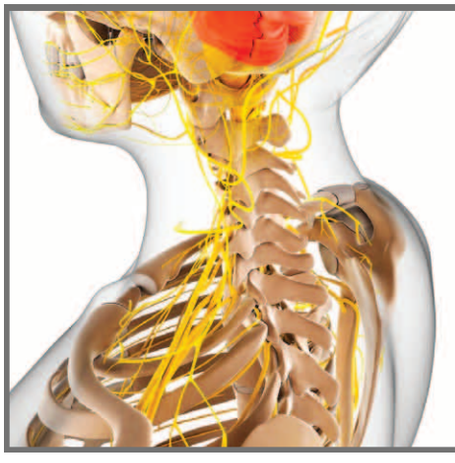
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by Geoff Olson

A stiff sentence

Redacting Julian Assange from the record

I was recently commissioned to write an article on arts and technology for a Canadian literary journal. It ballooned into a 5,000 word piece that ranged from the problems of social media platforms to the perils of artificial intelligence.

The editor, who I will call Byron, liked the essay and had some edits in mind. He asked if I "would seriously mind" removing one sentence. It was embedded in a paragraph on surveillance capitalism. This was it: "In the words of Wikileaks founder Julian Assange, the Internet is the 'biggest spy machine the world has ever seen.'"

I'd already made some changes at his request, and was prepared to nix the line. But when Byron attached the payment schedule for reaching agreement on the sentence, I balked. It felt coercive.

So I turned the question back on Byron. Would he seriously mind if I left in the quote? Whatever anyone thinks of Assange, he remains an acknowledged expert on digital secrecy and transparency. "Yes. I do mind. I think you diminish your own writing by doing so and thus diminish my publication," he responded.

As far he was concerned I may as well have written "as Hitler once said…" My resistance to dropping the sentence infuriated him, and the insults began to fly through my inbox. "You should really get some help rebalancing the old noggin," Byron wrote.

I later offered to alter the wording of the sentence to "Wikileaks founder *and former hacker* Julian Assange…" No go. The debate astounded me. "In my four decades working in the media, I've never come across an instance of a public figure being off-limits for quotation," I told him. "Oh, wow," he responded. "One might suppose that we live in extraordinary times. Who knew?"

Go ahead and remove the quote if you have to, I wrote. You're the editor. My one request was that he take responsibility for the redaction with a note at the bottom of the article. I would not self-censor on his behalf, and dangling a cheque in front of me wasn't going to change that.

Byron suggested this for the note: "Julian Assange is a figure of great controversy. The editors had asked Mr. Olson not to include the comment or quote as it did not, in the opinion of the editors, further the article in any substantial way. Nor do the editors approve of supporting the celebrity culture around the figure, nor the actions of Mr. Assange that they consider irresponsible, misogynist, ego-driven and counter productive to a progressive agenda. Mr. Olson refused our request."

The reason I'm sharing this editorial tempest in a teapot is that, in a small way, it weirdly mirrors the AngloAmerican press's handling of the Assange affair.

Byron insisted the Wikileaks founder is a "misogynist" and "celebrity hound who helped get Donald Trump elected." In the first instance, he was referencing the international arrest warrant issued by Sweden in 2010 following accusations of sexual misconduct by Assange. A Stockholm prosecutor initiated the investigation and the chief prosecutor threw it out a day later, after finding no evidence of criminality. Another prosecutor reinstated investigation in the fall of 2010. The warrant was not signed on the basis that he was charged with any offence, but that he was wanted for questioning. As a result, Assange sought political asylum at the Ecuadorian embassy in London in 2012, fearing that once he was under Sweden's jurisdiction Sweden would extradite him to the US.

The rape meme has been a central plank in the public demonization of Assange. So where does this game of whack-a-molestor stand now? On November 19, Sweden finally threw out the arrest warrant – a MacGuffin no longer needed to move along the plot of extraditing Assange to the US.

So to emphasize, there are no rape charges against Assange in Sweden. There are espionage charges against Assange in the US. As for the claim that he helped get Trump elected, we'll return to that later.

Two decades' worth of corporate press commentary on Assange has made for a witches' brew of well-sourced facts, anonymous smears, and outright fictions.

Some background here. In 2006 a blonde-dyed Australian national and former hacker launched a web-based initiative at global transparency: a publishing platform that allowed whistleblowers across the world to safely and anonymously expose criminality and corruption. Wikileaks first commanded global pubic attention in 2010 with its release of leaked State Department cables, Guantanamo secrets, the Afghan War Diaries and the Iraq War Logs "collateral murder video," which revealed a 2007 U.S. air strike in Baghdad against Iraqi civilians. Gun camera footage captured the slaughter of eight men including two war correspondents from Reuters. ("Light 'em up," says one of the laughing voices in the video, which spread like global wildfire on broadcasts, broadsheets and blogs.)

After Wikileaks made publishing arrangements with *The Guardian* and *The New York Times,* both publications began to mine a rich vein of news gold for many weeks. Assange won the 2011 Martha Gellhorn prize for journalism, with the judges congratulating him on giving "the public more scoops than most journalists can imagine." Yet within a short time, the reporting shifted from the content of Wikileaks revelations to the character of the organization's founder, including tabloid-like speculations on his hygiene by the NYT's chief editor.

In August 2012, Ecuadorian foreign minister Ricardo Patiño announced that his country was granting political asylum to Assange because of the danger presented by the United States' secret investigation against him. For 5 years, there were no complaints from Ecuador about Assange. The clock only began to tick in May of 2017, after the leftist Ecuadorian government of President Rafael Correa fell to a regime friendlier to Washington.

Dragged from the embassy by British police in April, Assange is now being held in near-isolation in Belmarsh maximum-security prison. If extradited to the US, he will be charged with 18 counts under the 1917 US espionage act for publishing US war crimes. He faces 175 years in prison if convicted.

Assange reportedly had difficulty getting his words out in an October court appearance. "I can't think properly," the 48 year-old activist said as he fought back tears. Some observers believe he was being drugged.

UN special rapporteur Nils Melzer deemed Assange's treatment in Belmarsh as "psychological torture." Late this November, more than 65 doctors from the UK, US, Australia, Germany, Italy and Sri Lanka issued an open letter calling for urgent action to protect the man's life. As reported by the World Socialist Web Site, the doctors warned Britain's Conservative Home Secretary Priti Patel that "Mr. Assange could die" because of years of detention in the Ecuadorian embassy and his incarceration in near-isolation at Belmarsh.

"He's locked up 22 or 23 hours a day," said his father, John Shipton, in a November interview in *The Irish Examiner.* "It's a grade A maximum security prison. Because those in it are treated like terrorists, that's what Julian is being subjected to."

Not that you would have heard much of the above from the US/UK press. In August, when ex-Pink Floyd musician Roger Waters performed "Wish You were Here" at a rally for the Wikileaks founder outside the Home Office in London, it barely registered a blip in the media.

Two decades' worth of corporate press commentary on Assange has made for a witches' brew of well-sourced facts, anonymous smears, and outright fictions. In November of 2018, *The Guardian* reported that former Trump campaign manager Paul Manafort "held secret talks with Assange" at Ecuador's embassy in London. Yet none of Manafort's passports had stamps for the times in question, and his name never appeared in the embassy's visitor manifest, according to *The Washington Post*. Regardless, the front-page report remains up on The Guardian's website.

Even though big media outlets have trafficked in dubious info and sheer bunkum about Assange, a few of these have see the writing on the wall. Extradition to and trial in the US "is a marked escalation in the effort to prosecute Mr. Assange, one that could have a chilling effect on American journalism as it has been practiced for generations," noted *The New York Times* before the press silence descended.

The founder of Wikileaks may be Byron's blasphemer,

but he's not my saint. A number of former associates have described him as irascible and domineering. The belief that Assange helped get Trump elected is an understandable inference based on his own questionable decisions. Holed up in the Ecuadorian embassy, he knew his prospects were dim if the hawkish Hillary Clinton won the presidential election in 2016. Trump was a more unknown quantity at the time. Through Twitter, Assange put feelers out in 2016 to Donald Trump Jr. When these communications were revealed, the publisher fell out of favour with a great many progressives. But the worst thing about this incident, along with the timing of the Hillary email leaks, is that that it seemingly repositioned Wikileaks from a transparency organization to a political front.

However, the idea that Trump owes his election victory to the publisher's missteps is farcical. And with the post-Mueller collapse of the "Russiagate" narrative, the attempt to spot-weld Assange to Putin has evaporated.

Should Assange's questionable moves, in 2016, retrospectively diminish Wikileaks' prior revelations of offences by the Bush/Cheney regime, and its many exposures of financial and state crimes across the world? Assange has had a long history of demonstrably brave stands. "He had titanium balls," one of his acquaintances told *Forbes* reporter Andy Greenberg of Assange's refusal to bend to legal threats from the Church of Scientology, back when he was systems administrator at an Australian Internet service provider.

As far as character flaws go, it's not the alleged abuse of either Internet privileges or his cat that landed the man in a Belmarsh prison cell, and put him in front of a judge for extradition. It's not a rumoured habit of smearing feces in the Ecuadorian embassy that resulted in the manure heaped on him by the AngloAmerican press. It's not his supposed misogyny that won bipartisan consensus on the planned extradition to the US. It's not his documented dalliance with Donald Jr. that resulted in a charge of 175 years under the 1917 Espionage Act.

It's Wikileaks's exposure of US/UK war crimes that did all the above. As far as I know, no one has ever accused Assange or his team of releasing false documents or creating "fake news." The problem for the state security apparatus, intelligence services and military-industrial-media complex is just the opposite: they preferred that the truths Wikileaks trafficked in be kept hidden. And it's been known since the time of Caesar that the most effective way of kneecapping a movement is to decapitate its leader.

Up until the widespread silence on the Assange jailing – and the rallies in his support since – the stenographers to power have painted Assange as a smelly, cat-abusing, Putin-loving human hazard light. By design or default, this sends an unmistakeable message to would-be whistleblowers with funny ideas of exposing high-level criminality and corruption.

It's been almost ten years since Wikileaks revealed the horrifying footage in the the "Collateral Murder" video. Those responsible and their commanders have never been identified, and as far as the public knows, have never been disciplined or brought to trial. Yet the man who helped bring this and other dark revelations to light is being held in near isolation, facing a life sentence or worse in the US.

So back to my debate with an editor over a single sentence in an essay for an artsy Canadian magazine. Byron offered me the option of a kill fee and I accepted (correct answer to his security question on the Interac payment: "Assange"). Rather than continue playing a losing game over a quote destined to be nixed or heavily qualified in print, I walked away. Had I chose to self-censor at the outset, I would have been playing along – in however small a way – in the wider game of silencing or demonizing the Wikileaks leader.

Byron isn't wrong in his insistence that Julian Assange is a divisive character. But for me, the most worrisome aspect is this: the willingness of an editor to redact a public statement simply because he feels the source is no longer on Team Progressive. And ironically, a source who is an editor, publisher and activist identified with issues of press freedom.

In a final email to Byron I wrote, "I now consider our back-and-forth to be part of a larger story of Assange's pending extradition, show trial, and the stifling of free speech by its so-called guardians … as a publisher and expert on digital secrecy and transparency, there is no more justification in redacting the words of Julian Assange from current discourse than there is justification in disappearing the man himself into the US prison-industrial complex."

Geoff Olson is a Vancouver writer and political cartoonist.

Independent Media Marie Aspiazu

MEDIA

Big Telecom fighting lower Internet fees

Back in August, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) significantly lowered the fees small Internet providers were required to pay Big Telecom for access to their networks.

As a result, a handful of small Internet providers like Teksavvy, Start.ca, Oricom and Distributel passed the lower wholesale rates on to their customers in the form of lower Internet bills and faster speeds, and reaffirmed their commitment to invest in rural broadband.

The CRTC's decision also ruled that the final wholesale rates would be applied retroactively to 2016, when the interim rates were set. This meant smaller providers would receive a three-year refund for being grossly overcharged by Big Telecom for access to their network. As you can imagine, Big Telecom is not happy and is doing everything in its power to hike Canada's Internet prices by reversing this landmark CRTC decision.

Following the CRTC's decision in August, Bell announced it would cut its investment in rural communities by 20 percent as a result of lower wholesale rates. This move would leave up to 20,000 homes without an Internet connection.

But their greed didn't stop there. Big Telecom immediately filed to overturn the CRTC's decision at the Federal Court of appeal. Most recently, they went a step further and asked the newly minted cabinet to reverse this decision. Their efforts reek of desperation, and if successful, our Internet prices will go back up and small providers will struggle to compete.

This was not the first time Big Telecom displayed such antics and took advantage of a "relatively seldom-exercised governmental appeal procedure". They did something very similar back in 2015, right after the Liberals were elected. In an attempt to monopolize fibre Internet infrastructure, Big Telecom went to the new cabinet to reverse a CRTC decision that granted small providers access to their fibre network. But Big Telecom's tantrum didn't work thanks to widespread public opposition. Over 80,000 signed OpenMedia's petition to reject Big Telecom's price gouging scheme — and the people won.

This historical victory strongly signals that we can win again, particularly given that the Liberals (and all other major parties) pledged to lower Internet prices during the election. To hold the government to that pledge, the first step is to insist that cabinet sends Big Telecom's proposal straight to the garbage bin where it belongs.

Lower wholesale rates mean small providers can compete with Big Telecom on a more level playing field and make better offerings to their customers, as we saw immediately after the CRTC's decision in August. This will also force big providers, like Bell to lower their prices in order to stay competitive. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it?

We cannot let Big Telecom get its way and strip away our hard won lower Internet prices. We must do everything in our power to make sure the CRTC decision from August is upheld. Sign OpenMedia's petition demanding that cabinet rejects Big Telecom's price gouging scheme, and share it widely!

Marie Aspiazu is a campaigner and communications specialist at OpenMedia, a non-profit organization that works to keep the Internet open, affordable, and surveillance-free.

The courage to care

by Duane and Catherine O'Kane

photo by Allison Cordner

We aren't avoiding each other because of the problems. We have problems because we are avoiding each other.

You are standing alone in an elevator, and someone enters. Quick, press a floor number. Avoid. Look up at the numbers. For most of us, these are moments that don't count. No big deal. Nothing is happening here.

Not true. The messages we are sending to this other person while we watch floor numbers are: "I don't trust you. You don't exist. Numbers are more important than you. You make me feel uncomfortable." Both people will leave the elevator not so elevated. Both will feel slightly worse and not know why.

What happens when you say hello and mean it instead? You feel better – sometimes a lot better. Let's take a good look at why.

At some level, you are no doubt very aware that we are all connected. But what is now rocking the world of psychology is a new appreciation that connection is active all of the time – including in elevators when we are looking the other way. Connection determines our state of wellbeing and personal happiness.

Like it or not, in every relationship, in every waking moment, whether close or cut off, whether choosing to make contact or choosing not to, silent or speaking, we are connected. We do not get to choose whether we are connected, we only get to choose what we are going to do with that connection. This is good news and bad news, depending on which way we decide to go.

In every communication there is content or a literal message. Underlying that, there is a relationship message that communicates how you feel, conveyed mostly non-verbally through body language, facial expression, and tone of voice. In terms of the impact on the receiver, the content of the message is worth about 20 percent, while the relationship level is responsible for about 80 percent. The relationship message overrides the content and is what's remembered, even in an elevator.

If you doubt the power of the relationship message, consider commercials for prescription drugs. Regardless of the literal content (which may include dire warnings about the side effects of the medication) the advertisement is delivered in a pleasant tone with smiling, happy faces. These commercials work because the relationship message overrides the content.

Many people assume that the power they have to influence others is attached to their position in their social, familial or organizational hierarchy. But at a relationship message level, everyone has equal power and influence, no matter what the designated power structure. If a boss has a difficult conversation with an employee, both are equally impacted.

Human beings are hardwired to connect with each other, and we do so through emotions. We have evolved not only because we need each other for survival, but because we need to care and be cared for. We have the capacity for profound sentimentality and love. We have formed societies not only to communally provide shelter and weather storms, but also to experience something beyond all of that: love.

The degree to which we avoid wholeheartedly caring for others is equal to the degree we experience stress. It's that simple. And the world is in the grip of stress and suffering mostly because we are avoiding each other. Disconnection is at the root of much of our pain, including mental and physical illness.

When we feel disconnected, anything goes, and often does. We don't care about the impact on another because we do not know who the other is. In the absence of knowing who another is, they become a problem instead of a person. If we actually knew the other authentically, we would not treat them the way we do.

We aren't avoiding each other because of the problems. We have problems because we are avoiding each other. As much as we might imagine feeling better on a tropical island away from the rest of the world, or avoiding others in the elevator, we suffer profoundly in isolation.

When we established Clearmind International in 1996, we had some sense of this truth. We ourselves were driven by caring and a desire to fire up the channels of caring in the human spirit. We have come a long way personally and professionally in our evolutionary journey, particularly in terms of realizing of how all-encompassing our need for connection is, at the core.

We believe that real connection is possible in every relationship, and that it can overcome every human dilemma. Evolution happens through real connection. We offer a professional counsellor training program, training and workshops which endeavour to show others *how* to care again. We practice this as a professional team for our clients, and in our marriage, at all levels of our human experience.

Most people believe the solution to stress is relaxation. When something triggers fear or anxiety, our nervous system deals with danger via the stress response, a short-term mobilization meant to flee the predator lurking in the bushes. When we remain highly stressed over the long term, a system meant to deal with inescapable life threats kicks in, and the opposite happens: we "freeze" or "shut down".

From the perspective of the nervous system, the antidote to fear, stress and anxiety is a feeling of safety. Human beings are pack animals and, as such, wired to find safety in connection. When we feel safe, we focus, process information better, engage with others, and perform at our best. We experience safety when the 80 percent relationship message is a caring one, regardless of any 20 percent content issues to be resolved. When we feel valued and cared for, we feel safe – which allows difficult situations to be resolved.

Wholehearted caring requires courage. Investing emotionally is a vulnerable act, whether it be in a partner, friend, a family member, a person at work, or even a stranger in an elevator. Sometimes it feels easy, like when we first fall in love. Sometimes it is harder and requires positive intention when, for example, it becomes apparent that our partner will never remember to pick up their socks.

Caring is the first ingredient of a potentially difficult conversation. Stating a positive relationship intention gives the other person a reason to listen further. When couples argue, they often reflexively withhold their love and do not put it back into the mix until they perceive the issue to be resolved. Issues are resolved more quickly when love is put into the mix from the outset.

Let's move beyond asking whether you want to have an impact. You don't get to choose whether you are having an impact. Rather, the question is: What kind of impact do you want to have? How you answer this will dictate how you manage your relationship message in every conversation, every relationship and every moment, because every moment counts, including now.

For free tickets to Clearmind Connects events visit: www.clearmind.com/clearmind-connects. Download your free audiobook from Clearmind at: http://bit.ly/REAL_Connection

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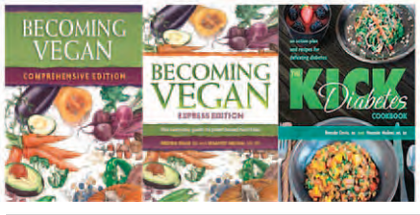

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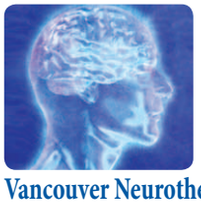

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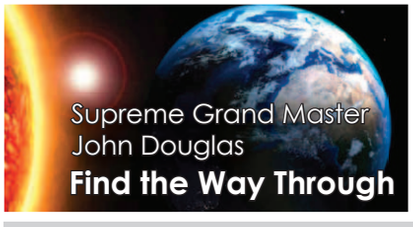

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Bells for Peace

An idea whose time has come

Individuals, families, city mayors and officials, and clergy from all faiths are encouraged to join the 2020 "Bells for Peace" campaign to unite the world for Peace.

On August 6, 2020, during the Tokyo Olympics, all Olympic Village video screens are to be tuned into the 75th Hiroshima Atomic Bomb Anniversary Ceremony. At exactly 8:15 am, the time the atomic bomb nicknamed "Little Boy" exploded over Hiroshima in 1945, every church, temple and shrine bell will ring throughout Japan, and simultaneously bells will ring around the world to acknowledge a moment of remembrance, reflection, hope and prayers for World Peace.

Then, at 11:02 am, on August 9, 2020, during the last day of the Tokyo Olympics, the exact time "Fat Man" exploded over Nagasaki, every church, temple and shrine bell, will again ring throughout Japan, and simultaneously bells will ring around the world to acknowledge a moment of remembrance, reflection, hope and prayers for World Peace. The NHK TV feed is to be sent around the World.

This will be a very special message of Peace and a tribute to all the lives lost in the bombings. As you may know, our goal is also to involve Music Hands as a message of peace in the Olympic ceremonies. We will send further news in the next newsletter regarding these efforts. – *Richard Fukuhara*

Richard Fukuhara died in December 2018. So it is now up to us to pick up the torch and achieve the Bells for Peace vision to be broadcast around the world on the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

People around the world are invited to ring bells 75 times at the moment the nuclear weapons exploded over each city. We do this both to bear witness and to unite our passion for peace with our resolve to eliminate nuclear weapons. The Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 will host a record 33 sports and 339 events from July 24 to August 9. The whole world will be watching. *Carpe Diem.* Seize these moments.

You, or your organization, church, temple, synagogue, civic hall, peace tower, fire hall, university, city, town, country, NGO, corporation, restaurateur, truck drivers, philanthropic fund, college, bell maker, glockenspiel players, temple gong, musician, drummers, symphony orchestra, high school band, elementary school, door bell, car horn, or pots and pans are all invited to make a powerful sound around Earth for the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Let peace ring clearly. Lets fully support this beautiful vision for peace. Please share this message with all. It will also be posted at commonground.ca

Notes on peace

The Christmas Truce: on Christmas Day, in the first year of World War I, German, British and French soldiers disobeyed their superiors and fraternized with "the enemy" along two-thirds of the Western Front. German troops held Christmas trees up out of the trenches with signs, "Merry Christmas." "You no shoot, we no shoot." Thousands of troops streamed across the no-man's land. Soldiers embraced men they had been trying to kill a few short hours before.

The use of nuclear weapons breach all of the following declarations and conventions:

- Declaration of St. Petersburg, 1868, because unnecessary suffering would be caused and there would be no avoidance or minimizing of incidental loss of civilian life;
- Hague Convention, 1907, because unnecessary suffering would be caused and there would be no guarantee of the inviolability of neutral nations;
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, because long-lasting radioactive contamination would interfere with innocent people's right to life and health;
- Geneva Conventions, 1949, because protection of the wounded, sick, the infirm, expectant mothers, civilian hospitals and health workers would not be ensured;
- The Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions, 1977, because there would be massive incidental losses of civilian lives and widespread, long-term and severe damage to the environment.

For further information please contact Joseph Roberts, founder of Vancouver's first Walk for Peace 1982 & Common Ground publisher: office 604 733 2215 joseph@commonground.ca

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*...**Heartburn pill** from pg. 6*

So what do you believe?

I have had a front row seat on this controversy, reading many of the studies done on PPIs and then watching what guideline writers, physicians and other pundits say about them. Here's the big difference. The defenders of PPIs who don't think they are deadly have one thing mostly in common: they have ties to drug companies that make them. And they have a way of putting a smiley face on questions of safety. Just recently a three-year RCT run by researchers at McMaster University claimed to show that PPIs have few of the major harms found in observational studies. They claimed their RCT showed definitive proof of safety. Case closed.

Not so fast say others, pointing to what is a recent game-changer of a study. The largest observational study ever done on PPIs was published in the BMJ medical journal in March of 2019. Known as the Xie trial, it followed more than 300,000 US veterans for ten years, looking to see what kind of effects were seen in PPI users.

The results rocked the world.

The PPI patients were matched to other patients who were taking other classes of heartburn drugs. The researchers were extremely careful in this study, ruling out confounders like the types of diseases patients may have been suffering. The researchers found increased deaths by cardiovascular disease, chronic kidney disease and gastrointestinal cancer. All of these causes of death are corroborated by other observational studies, as well as studies in Canada and the US that analyzed reports made to national adverse event reporting systems.

How big were the differences?

The main finding of the Xie study is that the longer patients take a PPI, the more risk of harm they face. Obviously risks increase depending on how sick a person already is, how old they are and the amount of PPI they have swallowed over the years. The study found 45 excess deaths per 1000 patients in 10 years of follow-up in this group of predominately older male adults. If this is true for seniors in Canada taking a PPI over five years or so, (maybe half a million patients) this could mean more than 20,000 excess deaths in Canada due to long term PPI use.

So again, who do you believe?

Let's be clear about one thing that any researcher needs to do: follow the money. The multibillion dollar PPI industry has had an overly dominant impact on health effects messaging ever since these drugs were first approved in the early 1990s. At one point, Canadians were swallowing over a billion dollars a year worth of PPIs. Today, it's about $230 million per year due to generic versions being sold at much cheaper costs. Hence, there was a ton of money to shape our ignorance around the safety of these products.

The world's major drug companies have had a very important role in determining what we know – and especially what we don't know – about the safety of PPIs. This troubles me greatly. Why? Because if powerful companies wish to spread ignorance, and intentionally spread doubt, there are very few of us around to stop them.

Alan Cassels has studied pharmaceutical policies for 25 years and he lives in Victoria.

by Bruce Mason

Word(s) of the Year

connecting urgent ecojustice dots

William Blake (1757-1827) urged us "to see a world in a grain of sand", but the visionary poet didn't foresee the ubiquity of micro-plastics on beaches, in the oceans, more noticeable in every handful, never mind inside Earth's inhabitants. Nor did the great wordsmith imagine a Word of the Year (WOTY) would provide perspective and profound insight into the evolution of human awareness.

For 2019, the Oxford Dictionary selected "climate emergency" to best capture our zeitgeist. The UN Secretary-General described the ethos, mood, preoccupations of the last 12 months as "the defining issue of our time", with lasting cultural significance.

Oxford defines "climate emergency" as "a situation in which urgent action is required to reduce or halt climate change and avoid potentially irreversible environmental damage".

Analysis of language data shows the rapid rise of "climate emergency" from relative obscurity to the most prominent – and prominently debated – term of 2019. Usage increased dramatically over the year; by September it was more than 100 times as common as in the previous year.

Dictionary.com differs slightly. Their frequently used word, or term, with high search traffic, is "existential". They noted this captures "grappling with the survival – literally and figuratively – of our planet, our loved ones, our ways of life".

"Sustained interest in 'existential' in our lookup data, as well as in the news and culture, collectively reflects this," John Kelly, senior research editor at Dictionary.com explained. "But for all the feeling of doom and gloom, the word's philosophical underpinnings invite us to pause, shake off any pessimism or passivity, and ask: 'What choices do we make in the face of our challenges?'"

For Collins Dictionary – which has been in the word game for two centuries (since Blake's time) – the WOTY is "climate strike". Usage increased by a whopping 100-fold between 2018 and 2019. The crux of "climate strike" – Collins defines it as "a protest demanding action" – is a cry from millions of people to curb human-caused warming, to limit the worst consequences of climate degradation. "Listen to climate, geology, and atmospheric scientists" is a growing, global plea.

Among the myriad, alarming facts to share: since 2000, Earth has experienced 18 of 19 of its warmest years. This includes the hottest month (July, 2019) in 140 years of reliable record-keeping – nearly 2 degrees above the 20th century average. Although the three main sources may mince their respective 2019 WOTYs, they agree that research reveals a demonstrable escalation in the language used to articulate information and ideas concerning climate.

This data is hugely significant, indicating a marked shift in people's language choice, a conscious intensification, a challenging of accepted language, a re-framing of discussion with greater gravity and immediacy.

September 2019 Climate Strike. 100,000 people in Vancouver joined 7 million worldwide. Photo: Stephen Samuel.

Take your pick. Climate emergency. Existential. Climate strike. Each is a sea change and far cry from the relatively benign "climate change" which is now, finally, favoured by brain-dead and too-slowly awakening elites and media. WOTY experts also agree that a spike in usage occurred in September when teen-age Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg took centre stage globally, and millions took to the streets. That month (echoing Martin Luther King), she told the US Congress, "I have a dream that the people in power, as well as the media, start treating this crisis like the existential emergency it is."

At the UN climate action summit in New York she admonished, "You've stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words." In an emotionally charged speech which will ring through the ages (printed in Common Ground last November), she accused world leaders of ignoring science. "We are in the beginning of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth – how dare you!"

At Madrid's climate summit last month, she added, "It seems to have turned into some kind of opportunity for countries to negotiate loopholes and to avoid raising their ambition." She accused politicians of "clever accounting" and "creative PR".

The words ring true in laggard petro-states like Canada, where the latest throne speech laid out a series of climate commitments which total $816 million in 2020-21. Over the same period, economist Robyn Allan estimates the Trans-Mountain pipeline project will cost at least $12 billion in public funds. Fifteen times as much, and counting.

Under our banner "It's all connected", Common Ground has drawn attention to WOTYs as much more than mere upsurges in conversation. In 2016, "post-truth" followed by "complicit" and last year's, "toxic".

The 2019 choice clearly indicates heightened public awareness, an intersection of ecojustice and action on climate science. "Climate strikes" is coming face-to-face with horrific "existential", "climate emergency" and unprecedented, obscene inequity.

Back to Blake and his "Auguries of Innocence":

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

He wouldn't be surprised that youth now lead in this, our hour. Blake juxtaposed innocence with evil and injustice, valued boundless curiosity and wonder beyond science. Something that the innocence of children can access. It is lack of imagination, vision, seeing and connecting the big picture from detail, that's holding us back in delayed suicide.

The crisis is now evident in the womb and in a generation which has never experienced normal atmospheric temperatures. With an ability to imagine profound change and for which the status quo has no status, they are thankfully translating words into action as we countdown to decade zero.

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– S. Mitchell, November 2019

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Progress toward sustainable seafood

Oceans hold a lot of mystery, even for people who study them. But it's no mystery why they're in trouble. We've been using them to hide our waste – dumping oil, plastic, toxic chemicals, radioactive sludge, sewage and fishing gear into them for decades. Oceans also absorb much of the atmospheric heat from our indiscriminate fossil fuel burning. And we've been taking everything we can from them, including fish, seaweed, plankton, minerals and oil.

We've exploited many fish stocks to levels so low they can no longer be harvested. Ocean acidification and warming water from climate disruption are wiping out corals, shellfish and reef fish at a shockingly rapid rate.

We depend on oceans for so much, including half the oxygen that keeps us alive! They're also a primary source of protein for millions of people worldwide.

If we want to continue to enjoy all that oceans provide, we need to do everything we can to protect them and the life they support. Some people argue we should no longer eat seafood. We've reached that point for some species and are nearing it for many others, but it doesn't have to be that way. We can ensure the seafood we eat is caught and produced in ways that don't compromise stocks, the environment or human rights.

I still eat fish and have fished all my life. When I was young, my dad and I would catch salmon, sturgeon and halibut from the shores of English Bay and the Fraser River. Now there aren't enough fish left. I still enjoy being on the water — catching, cleaning, preparing and eating fish — but I'm aware many species are declining. I don't fish as often as I used to, and I make sure I catch from sustainable stocks and use the entire fish, but as populations plummet there are fewer sustainable options.

Of course, not everyone is lucky enough to be able to catch their own fish, which means having sustainable options at the store is critical. As public and corporate awareness about the risks posed by overfishing and uncontrolled aquaculture expansion have grown, food retailers in Canada have developed sustainable seafood policies and commitments. Many started sourcing eco-labelled products so consumers could see which products were the best choices.

Despite promising first steps, some sellers and suppliers have become complacent about seafood improvement plans.

Despite promising first steps, some sellers and suppliers have become complacent about seafood improvement plans. As a result, achieving sustainability throughout the seafood industry supply chain remains a work in progress.

To help provide incentives to retailers and information to seafood lovers, SeaChoice (a collaboration between the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecology Action Centre and Living Oceans Society) has developed Seafood Progress, an online resource. It makes it easier for consumers in Canada to find out retailers' policies on sourcing sustainable seafood, whether they're adhering to those policies and how they're performing compared to their peers.

In its recent second assessment, Seafood Progress found retailer performance had improved. Some was due to increased transparency, including two new companies that signed on to provide previously unpublished information. Positive new initiatives also helped, including more regular disclosure of performance against commitments, publishing information about where products come from and how they're produced, and new actions to support improvements for seafood commodities that continue to have sustainability concerns.

But retailers must do more to ensure their seafood products are environmentally sustainable and socially responsible. This means expanding the scope of their commitments to cover all seafood products they sell, in all their stores. It also requires continuing to work with suppliers and producers to improve practices across the board and make sure the sustainable seafood supply meets consumer demand.

Unsustainable seafood is common in the Canadian marketplace. But it doesn't have to be. Canada's major retailers have a responsibility to meet their customers' expectations that seafood production doesn't take more fish than can be replenished, harm or kill marine animals unnecessarily, pollute watersheds and wetlands or exploit vulnerable people.

Meaningful commitments to sustainable procurement by Canada's largest seafood businesses will go a long way toward achieving this. It's no mystery that if we want to continue to eat fish, we must do it responsibly. Seafood Progress has invited seafood retailers, suppliers and consumers to join in pushing to achieve this goal.

David Suzuki is a scientist, broadcaster, author and co-founder of the David Suzuki Foundation. Written with contributions from David Suzuki Foundation Senior Editor and Writer Ian Hanington. Learn more at davidsuzuki.org.

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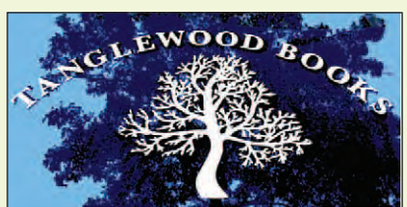

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Now that the Queen is our largest cannabis dealer…

How are things?

by Shawn P. Buckley

photo © Margo Amalie | Unsplash

I have been a criminal defence attorney for 25 years and have witnessed the Crown and the courts relentlessly punish persons caught with cannabis. Regarding any poor soul who has purchased a six month or a year supply for their personal use, I have witnessed the police "experts" mislead the courts with the big lie that such people must be trafficking, because cannabis does not last a year and consequently the amount seized cannot be for personal use.

Her Majesty is not finished punishing persons caught with cannabis. The difference is that now She is only punishing people caught with cannabis that the Crown is not making a profit from. We have moved from protecting the citizens from the "danger" of cannabis to protecting the profits of the Crown. And as with any crony capitalism scheme, there are casualties.

It might surprise some to learn that many in the cannabis black market were afraid of legalization because they expected more enforcement. Indeed, some of the compassion clubs who were my clients voluntarily shut down just before legalization. Others have shut down after legalization because of enforcement action that was absent when cannabis was illegal. This has had serious health consequences.

People are still relying on compassion clubs to meet their medical needs for several reasons. One is cost. Legal cannabis is expensive because of deliberate over-regulation and the Crown taking a cut of the profit. Many find that the quality of cannabis at compassion clubs, and in the black market generally, is superior to legal cannabis. For some, this quality difference is the difference between effective medication and ineffective medication. Another issue is selection, and not just of bud. In *R. v. Smith*, the Supreme Court of Canada made it clear that persons with medical need have a constitutional right to cannabis in all forms. Smith was a baker for a compassion club, and the Court agreed that persons in medical need have a right to cannabis edibles, because they act differently than other forms of cannabis.

Edibles are not yet legal, but when they become legal on July 1, 2020, we will still see people accessing compassion club edibles. This is because of cost and potency. Presently, a typical compassion club cookie costs around $7 and will have around 200 mcg of THC. A person who uses edibles for pain control, may cut that cookie into four pieces and be able to get four nights sleep for less then $2 a night. Legal edibles will be limited to 10 mcg of THC, meaning that a person would have to eat 5 legal cookies to get the same effect as eating a quarter of one from a compassion club. We don't know what the cost of legal cookies will be, but the last time I looked in Washington State, a 10 mcg cookie was over $10 USD. Persons of poor means will not be able to afford this.

In legalizing cannabis, the government has decided to limit any dosage unit (say in a cookie or a drink) to 10 mcg of THC. This is akin to legalizing alcohol providing it is under 6 percent, making beer and coolers legal but leaving wine and spirits in the black market. This is a recipe to ensure that the cannabis black market continues to thrive, which many will view positively considering the cost and quality issues with legal cannabis.

As far as I am aware, there has never been a death caused by cannabis, either in Canada or elsewhere. Cannabis does not suppress respiration the same way some other drugs do. This makes cannabis safer than common things like peanuts, shell fish and acetaminophen which kill Canadians yearly. Considering its low risk, the government had the option of simply de-criminalizing cannabis and letting the *Food and Drugs Act* apply to regulate it like any other food or drug. Instead, we have very strict regulations which drive up the price, and which so far seems to give large companies preferential treatment in licence approval. My office prepares cannabis licences and we are not alone in the view that large companies that have former politicians as front persons get licences while everyone else waits.

While favouring connected companies might benefit the few, taxpayers are left holding the bag. If cannabis was simply legalized, governments would get a windfall with sales taxes and income taxes on previously untaxed sales. Instead we have government monopolies on distribution and, in some cases, for online sales, like in Alberta. Yet despite the monopoly, governments are still proving able to do what governments do best: lose taxpayer money. I spoke to John Carle of the Alberta Cannabis Council who provided me with an estimate that the Alberta Government is expected to lose $90 million dollars in the first two years of legalization despite having a monopoly for distribution and online sales.

The war on drugs has taken a turn for the worse. Governments are losing money. Persons with medical need are losing their low-cost supply. Enforcement is up, freedom is down.

Lawyer **Shawn Buckley** focuses on protecting access to natural remedies including cannabis. He has helped set up compassion clubs and has defended them when necessary. He is president of the Natural Health Products Protection Assn., a non-profit dedicated to protecting health freedoms. (visit **buckleyandco.ca** and **nhppa.org**)

Celebrating guardians of peace, love and truth

common ground

We only care about what we know. We will only protect what we love.

Common Ground is here to inform, educate and empower people to know and care enough to protect what we love. Peace is the way to heal our world devasted by greed and ignorance, and torn by conflicts ignited by those whose love of power tries to subvert the power of love.

Common Ground takes an honest account of each situation and has the courage and empathy to take action. We endeavor to hold each edition of Common Ground to the highest principles of journalistic integrity, compassion, scientific knowledge and philosophical honestly.

We shall celebrate our journey to health, joy, and peace with you, the thoughtful, caring readers of Common Ground. Thank you for your continued support.

Our special thankyous go to our last month's donors: Shirley R., Oliver, BC, Janet & Paul G., Victoria, BC, Greg & Sheila W., Sooke, BC, Warner & Judy H., Victoria, BC, Marilynn K., Delta, BC, James Fredrick & Lynne W., West Vancouver, Edith F., Vancouver, Evelyn M. L., Vancouver, Heather Ruth P., Burnaby, John S., Vancouver.

We can accomplish even more in 2020 with your support

Common Ground has served health, peace and justice since 1982. In 37 years, we have distributed millions of free copies. Now, we are asking you to help the magazine you love so we can continue to educate, empower and inspire more people. We face massive issues from climate change, pipelines, 5G, toxic fish farms, LNG, environmental destruction, GMOs, homelessness, corruption, cronyism, an undemocratic, colonial FPTP electoral system, lack of reconciliation, monopolies, corporate bullying, inequality, human rights abuse, post-truth media, threats of war, big pharma… and that's just a starter list. We will not run out of material anytime soon.

Common Ground has informed people for over three decades. And we need to do more to push back against the problems and develop solutions. But we need your help to accomplish the tasks before us. Your financial support will enable Common Ground to educate and inspire to make our city, province, country, and the world a safer, more intelligent place to live. Your dollars help reach more people.

Please send your donation by mail to Common Ground, 3152 West 8th Ave, Vancouver, BC, V6K 2C3. Make cheques payable to Common Ground. Or send an E-transfer to Common Ground via: joseph@commonground.ca, or call 604 733 2215 to gift with your credit card. Thank you for you continued encouragement, inspiration and heartfelt support.

Joseph Roberts
Common Ground
Publisher & founder (est.1982)